Mimi Gibson

Q&A

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Mimi Gibson and Suzanne Alexander on Racket Squad, "The Case of No Questions Asked" (1952).

SAMUEL CLAESSON

Mimi Gibson was perhaps the most prolific child actresses of the 1950s. She spent her early childhood in Renton, Washington, until the passing of her father led her and her mother to move to Hollywood. It was there that, according to columnist Bob Thomas, that an agent saw her playing in a yard which led to a fruitful career as an actress and model. She made her onstage debut as Miss Glamour in Miniature, winning two gowns before appearing in movies like *The Eternal Sea* (1955), *The Ten Commandments* (1956), *Strange Intruder* (1956), *Drango* (1957), and *Houseboat* (1958). Mimi was phenomenally talented and became one of Hollywood's great success stories by her self-imposed retirement after filming an episode of *My Three Sons*. She became a realtor with her husband Carl Rahal; a farmer caring for her goats; and an activist who has fought for the rights of child actors by pushing for legislation and revisions to the Coogan Law. She frequently appears on Vegas Voice TV and other outlets. Her autobiography, Working Kid, was published in 2021.

Samuel Claesson: It was just reported that Rudy Lee [1944-1996], who you appeared with in *Corky of Gasoline Alley* (1951), died in 1996. Were you close with him?

Mimi Gibson: I did a few movies with him, typically as siblings. He was a sweet and talented boy, but he had an angry mother who was quite mean to him between rehearsals. I wanted to reconnect with him when I got older, but my mother told me that he had "gone bad."

Sophia Loren and Mimi Gibson in Houseboat (1958).

Mimi Gibson and John Hudson on Men Into Space, "Lunar Secret" (1960).

SC: Kathryn Grant recently died. How would you describe working with her in *The Brothers Rico* (1957)?

Mimi Gibson: There was a lot of drama with her on set. She was nice, but had a lot of anxiety because she and Bing had planned to get married until he went fishing to think about it. I heard that he was worried that their age difference was an issue. Kathryn waited and paced around the set. It was sad. They eventually got married though, which was good because I think she was a good wife who kept him grounded and away from alcohol and other bad stuff.

SC: How about *The Children's Hour* (1961)?

Mimi Gibson: I was a teenager when we filmed that. The stars were Audrey Hepburn and Shirley MacLaine, and I'll tell you that they couldn't have been more different. Audrey was sweet, kind, and just a lovely person. Shirley was demanding, unfriendly, and . . . had an unsavory laugh, too.

SC: What was it like working on *The Red Skelton Show*?

Mimi Gibson: I did nine episodes of that. Red was absolutely one in a million... so sweet, kind, and hilarious. He had a rule, though, that if you broke character on camera, you wouldn't be invited back. I never cracked up on camera, thankfully, so I kept getting asked back.

Mimi Gibson, Clifton Webb and Donald Losby in The Remarkable Mr. Pennypacker (1959).

SC: I read your memoirs recently, and your experience on *The Loretta Young Show* wasn't so good.

Mimi Gibson: She was abusive. There was a scene in the episode I was in where I was supposed to cry, and I wasn't crying enough so Loretta asked one of the girls what she should do to get me to cry. She pinched me and bent my fingers. I couldn't believe it because no adult had ever done that to me. She later called me a "brat" and used her influence to have me barred from the studio.

SC: Was there ever a role that you were offered, but rejected?

Mimi Gibson: We filmed the first episode of *Blondie*, based on the comics of the same name. It took a few years before a network picked it up for a season, but by then I was about to do a film and couldn't do both. My mother decided that I'd do the film instead.

SC: How about a role that you pursued, but didn't get?

Mimi Gibson: I was cast in *Officer's Choice*, a television series that starred Randolph Scott and Scott Brady. We filmed the pilot where I was the daughter of a sheriff with a criminal record. There were a lot of action-filled scenes involved. I remember one of the actors was injured after falling off of a horse. I was shaken because I'd never seen somebody get hurt like that.

SC: What was Scott Brady like?

Mimi Gibson: He was weird and had an unusual fascination with me. I told my mother and she said "stay away from him."

SC: Why did you quit acting?

Mimi Gibson: As I got older, I noticed that some of the men in Hollywood were looking at me in a more sexual way and I didn't like it nor did I want to get involved in it. It became more difficult to get acting parts, too, as a teenager because studios could get adults who looked like teenagers to play those parts without having to work around school schedules and regulations. We were told about this when I was younger, but my mother didn't want to believe it. She thought it'd last forever.

SC: If you were offered a role on Netflix or something, would you return to acting?

Mimi Gibson: You'd have to resuscitate me because I'd collapse from shock, but I did appear in a documentary with Beverly Washburn and Sharon Baird called *Here's Looking At You, Kids* that premiered at the Winchester Theatre a few weeks ago. The Vegas Voice referred to us as the "Three Mouseketeers." We're great friends.

SC: Do you have any plans for 2025?

Mimi Gibson: I'm still unpacking since my recent move to Las Vegas. I have mail from fans piling up, movies I want to watch, and neighbors I want to meet. It's been a difficult year so far with the wildfires and our country pulling out of the Paris Climate Agreement, but I'm very thankful for my life and my wonderful fans.